

//


“LONDON”

AN

Historical Poem

BY

**MAJOR GREENWOOD, M.D., LL.B.,
BARRISTER AT LAW.**



Reprinted from "City of London Illustrated," June, 1914.

“LONDON”

AN

Historical Poem

BY

MAJOR GREENWOOD, M.D., LL.B.,
BARRISTER AT LAW.

Reprinted from "City of London Illustrated," June, 1914.

London.

"At length they all to mery London came
To mery London, my most kyndly Nurse,
That to us gave this Life's first native sourse,
Though from another place I take my name,
An house of ancient fame."

Edmund Spencer
PROTHALAMION.

O London, City of my earliest dreams!
Home of my fathers, ancient Capital
Of Britain's empire! Thy past history seems
To me a golden book, whose pages all
A vision of thy mighty past recall:
And as I pass along thy well known streets,
Marking some site, or spot memorial
Of days that were, my heart more quickly beats,
As each its story tells, and the same tale repeats:—

What London was in those dim days of old,
How changed from what she was to what she is:
And though her streets were never paved with gold,
They haunted are with golden memories:
And as they one by one in sequence rise,
A wondrous vista cometh into view,
Which as a dream we see with mental eyes—
We understand how our own London grew,
As pictures come and go, and the dark past renew.

A "Place of waters"! First thy Celtic name,
 O London, speaks of thy first citizens:
 And "Lud" — The cult of Lud, — repeats the same:
 And this is all the ardent searcher kens
 Of that far epoch. But its citizens
 Have left memorials of their sojourn here,
 Buried in fields, in mound, morass, and fens,
 That teach us what this ancient people were,
 When disinterred are horn, and knife, and hunting spear.

The Thames, the City's pride, as now rolled down,
 Receiving in its flood the Fleet and Lea,
 But who can picture what old London town
 Then to the eye of man appeared to be?
 A hillock bare, where now St. Paul's we see:
 Perchance, rude dwellings of our sires of yore,
 Like as in foreign climes far travellers see,
 Wrought of the trees, that decked the country o'er
 Ere stone was used to make a dwelling strong, and sure.

Ah, what a vision unto him appears,
 Who on old Thames's flood now travels down
 From Westminster to where the Tower uprears
 His hoary battlements above the town:
 Who sees in thought the scene, when there were none
 Of all the signs of busy modern life:
 And pictures what it was in ages gone,
 Ere changes made by centuries of strife,
 And contemplates how great, how little too, is life!

Next came the Roman, mighty conqueror!
 He saw the scene we can but dream of now:
 And Cæsar marching in the van of war,
 Resolved to make the stubborn Briton bow,
 From Kentish heights beheld the distant foe,
 Gathered in arms their country to defend,
 As on he swept to ford the stream below,
 Eager to fight, intent to gain his end,
 And 'neath the Roman yoke another race to bend.

Thou did'st not build the Tower (2); and nothing there.

Far as the eye can reach from Thames's flood,
Doth to thy former presence witness bear!

Gone are thy walls that circling London stood,
And fenced her in from many a hostile brood!

Saxon, and Dane, and Norman, knew them well,

And passed away, leaving them sound and good;
But though some fragments yet remain to tell
Of them that built them, in obscurity they dwell.

But though the Roman monuments be few,

To those that gaze on London as it is:

If we but burrow down, and reach unto

A depth of twenty feet, or more, I wis;

On tile and marble ancient traceries

Speak of her Roman masters, and declare

Their wondrous skill in Art, and more than this.

The coins and urns, and weapons hidden there.

Make us to think of them by whom they fashioned were.

Next came the Saxon, but we look in vain

To find his handiwork in brick or stone:

No stately ruins mark his ancient reign:

He liked not cities, and old London town

By him was left deserted and alone:

No history tells the life that then she led,

Or how she fared: and only this is known,

That she lived on, when all around was dead,

Coming onto the light, when the dark days had fled.

And when again she stepped into the light

A mighty change had come upon the scene:

A century and more (3) had taken flight,

Since last in History's record she had been—

A Roman city then, and now, I ween,

The capital of Saxon England fair:

And they who first her walls with scorn had seen,

Now used their best endeavours to repair

The gaps that time had made, and took them in their care.

Great Alfred saw thy value in his days:

Rebuilt thy ancient walls, and made them strong:

Renamed the gates he did from ruin raise,

Fitting them once again for service long:

And through those gates a motley concourse throng,—
Saxon and Dane, who waged for many a year

A warfare that in doubtful balance hung,

Before thy walls did hostile fleets appear,

And sometimes Dane, and sometimes Saxon victors were.

And London Bridge, the first that History knows,

Now rears its length across Thames' surging tide
Tis said in Roman times a bridge arose,

That linked old London with the Kentish side:

But if such bridge there were, though not denied
The likelihood, no traces now remain

To tell of it—Time doth the secret hide

And every search for earlier bridge is vain,

Than that which once did stand in Ethelred's sad reign old.

Last came the Norman—After Senlac fight,

When slain was Harold on that fatal day,

Duke William with the vanguard of his might,

Took towards London his triumphant way:

Yet not by force of arms did he essay
To batter thy strong battlements adown,

But sought to make thee own his lawful sway,

And sit an English King on Harold's throne,

And in his stead put on the Anglo-Saxon crown.

But thou did'st hesitate, and wert in doubt—

For loyal thou to the old Saxon line

And shut thy gates, and stoutly set about

To foil the Conqueror in his design.

Had'st thou persisted in this mood of thine,
Another page in History's book had been!

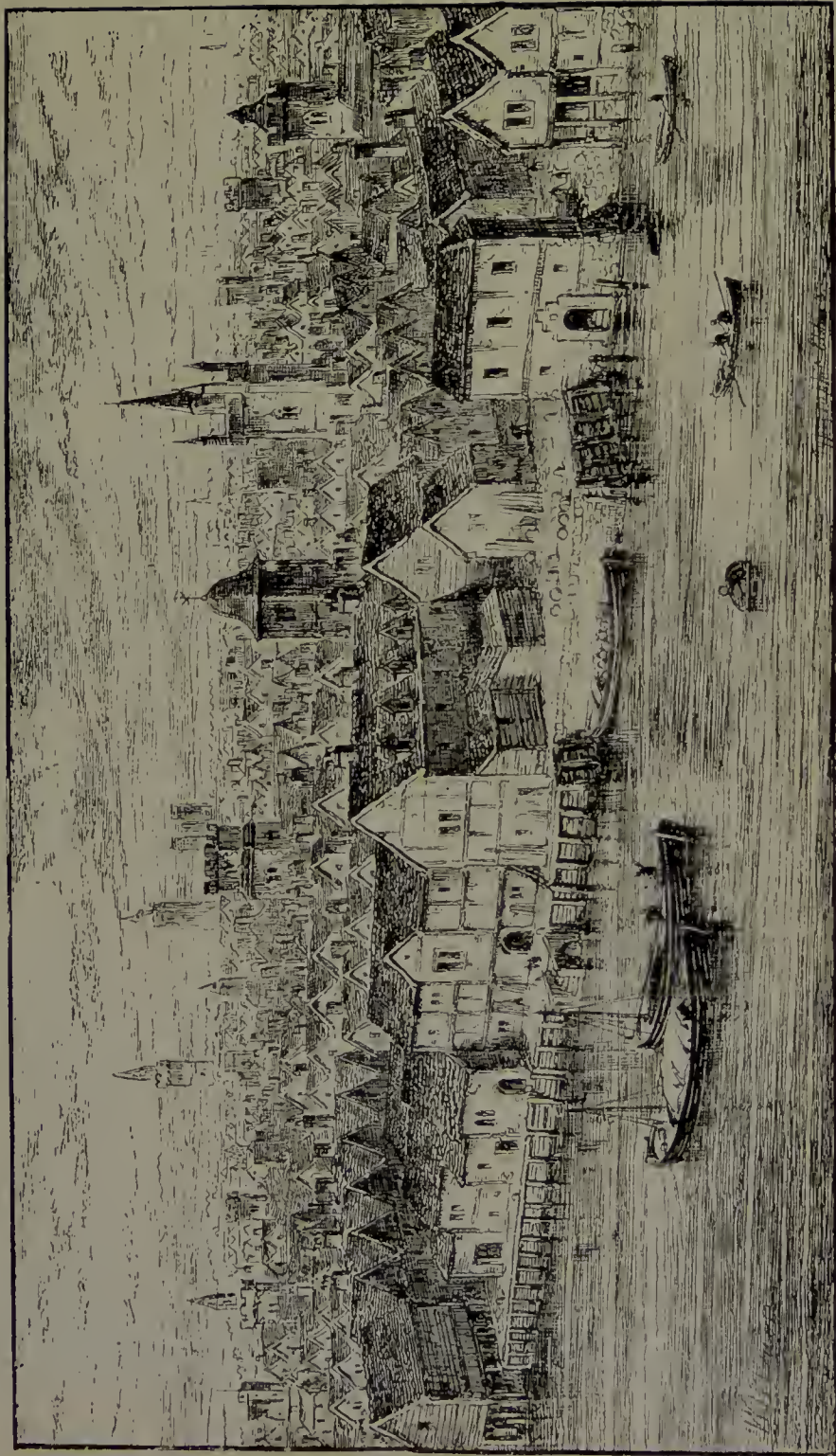
But later unto him thou did'st incline,

Deeming that peace was best: and though unseen,

It was the hand of Fate that then did intervene.

THE STEEL YARD AND NEIGHBOURHOOD IN 1340.

From Van Wyngards Plan taken for Philip II of Spain.



About 1658.

This Map extends from L



THE SEVERALL CHVRCHES WIT

Distinguiſhed by ſeverall Figureſ. By which allſoe the eye m
which could not well be otherwiſe demonſtrated in regard of the ſmal

Faith under Pauls (near

In's Inn on left to Tower Hill on right.



THE WALLS OF LONDON.

partly be guided to the Eminent Streetf in or neere which they stand
ale by which this Mapp if described.

entre) Smithfield above.

And, London, thy first Charter now appears,
 That is, the first that History witnesseth;
 And looking backward through nine hundred years,
 The ancient parchment speaks to us, and saith
 Unto the Londoners of latest breath,
 "Emblem of civic liberty am I:
 While that remains I triumph over death:
 King, Bishop, Portreeve, all have long gone by,
 But still remain the rights, whereof I testify!"

That Charter was the first, but not the last;
 And as they one and all come into view,
 They tell how London's citizens held fast
 To what from history's dawn had been their due
 Rights that no king had granted them unto, 50
 Rights that no king could ever take away,
 So long as they unto themselves were true:
 And London keeps those rights until this day,
 So may she flourish still, and keep those rights for aye!

Although, at first, when the stern Norman came,
 It grieved thee much. It seemed the Conqueror's grip
 Was on thy throat, and to thy further shame
 The Tower arose to be a constant whip
 Through many an age: yet nought could ever strip
 Thy ancient freedom from thee. All in vain,
 Was feudal force, and tyranny to trip
 The foot of freedom! And thou did'st retain
 Thy liberties, though threatened o'er and o'er again.

And London, both in fair and stormy weather,
 Thy growth went on, greater and greater still,
 As Saxon, Dane, and Norman strove together
 To make thee fit thy destined place to fill.
 Within thy walls, secure from harm and ill,
 The hunted serf found refuge prompt and sure:
 No feudal lord could work his cruel will,
 Within thy liberties his rule was o'er:
 The serf a freeman now, a bondsman nevermore!

And many a building fair within thy walls,
 And suburbs, now arose on every side:
 We see in all its grandeur old St. Paul's
 Arise, and tower aloft in stately pride —
 The great cathedral, where from far and wide
 The votaries came to Erkenwald's famed tomb:
 Destined for many ages to abide,
 And then, at last, to meet a fiery doom.
 That day, when over all destruction seemed to loom!

Great churches, too, were built, and some restored.
 And abbeys fair, and cloistered priories:
 Old writers of the period record
 Thy glorious aspect to the traveller's eyes —
 Fitzstephen's pictures but in fancy rise
 Before us now, for all have passed away,
 Save relics left o'er which to moralise,
 And take our memory back unto the day,
 When Norman, and Plantagenet, o'er England once held
 sway.

Then came thy second bridge, whose origin
 Is wrapped in mystery, and legend old:
 But if we know not how it did begin,
 In its completed form the outline bold
 Confronts us everywhere, when we behold
 The medieval City great and fair,
 In ancient print, or Agas' map enrolled —
 We see its arches, that tall houses bear,
 Its gates, St. Thomas' shrine, as in the days that were.

Beneath those narrow arches hath flowed down
 Much water, while grew, waned, and passed away
 The pride and glory of old London town:
 And, save the Tower, the bridge did longest stay,
 Till sapped by slow, irreparable, decay,
 It got infirm, and could not be made good:
 So at the last, it taken was away,
 And a new bridge laid down across the flood,
 That stands a little west of where the old bridge stood.

But the old Tower, the grand old Tower, remains,
 The only relie of a time long gone!
 The years go by, and as each century wanes,
 Still stands the Tower and witnesseth alone
 To what old London was, to what has grown:
 And on the busy signs of modern life,
 With patriarchal front it looketh down
 In peaceful age. Gone are the days of strife,
 With which its youth, and its maturity, were rife!

And though unchanged is still its massive frame,
 As when the Norman builded it, I trow,
 And though it answers to the selfsame name,
 No medieval fortress is it now.
 Dry is the moat. No longer Thames doth flow
 Around its walls, and through the "Traitors' Gate"
 No longer, as of old, do traitors go:
 No tyrant rules within in royal state,
 No prisoner in its cells bemoans his hapless fate.

'Tis now a mighty storehouse of the past,
 Museum of a nation's history:
 And memories cling thereto, that shall outlast
 The stones that witness of what used to be:
 And visions strange the visitor may see,
 That paces pensively its halls among,
 And sounds be in his ears, that none but he
 May hear amid the slowly moving throng,
 That daily haunt the spot, and stroll its ways along.

And yet if things inanimate may see,
 If they the gift of memory retain,
 How strange our London bridge must seem to thee,
 When thou look'st back, and call'st to mind again
 That bridge, thy fellow, that with thee did reign
 For many a century o'er London town!
 But one bridge then, but now how many span
 Old Thames's stream, and one thy height doth crown,
 That bears thy name, and o'er thy battlements looks down!

Departed the old order, come the new,
 And London of the past lies neath our feet:
 'Tis London of the present now we view,
 And London's history may itself repeat.
 Still the same names describe each ancient street,
 Trod by our ancestors in days of yore,
 As to and fro they went with busy feet:
 And in their steps we tread, as they before—
 So others too, shall tread, when we shall be no more!

And other Londoners shall then arise
 To follow us—Oh, may their London be
 As stout of heart, as strong in enterprise,
 As was that London, whose remains we see:
 Still capital of Britain great and free,
 And of her Colonies, and Empire vast,
 Oppression's scourge, the home of liberty:
 And may her sons still reverence the past,
 And may their fathers' work be destined still to last!

Oh, may no internecine strife be bred,
 And Londoner to Londoner be foe!
 'Twas union in the past the way that led:
 'Twas union made her great, and kept her so:
 Disunion's fruit is but to overthrow,
 And great and greater London should beware,
 That by dissension both may be brought low —
 Then be the charge committed to their care
 The pride of both! In it all Londoners should share.

For those who revel in the distant past,
 And strive to bring the breath of life again,
 What city in the panorama vast
 Of bygone states, in history's pages plain,
 Such store illimitable doth retain
 Of truth and romance—such as city none
 Has e'er example given, not in vain,
 Of what by civic manhood may be done,
 By human enterprise, and toil be surely won!

God bless thee, London! May thy sons to be
 In times to come live like their sires of old,
 And may they in the future steadfastly
 Aim to breed men, rather than breeding gold!
 'Tis manhood's worth alone States doth uphold,
 And wealth without will surely breed decay:
 Wealth will persist, wherever men are bold,
 Maintain the right, and justice do alway;
 But where they do not so, wealth soon will flee away!

- (1)—A Celtic River God. See Sir Lawrence Gomme's "London," Chapter II, Celtic Origins.
- (2)—It was a vulgar belief that Julius Caesar built a part of the tower. Comp. Gray's "Ye Towers of Julius, London's lasting shame," etc.
- (3)—The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records in A.D. 459 the defeat of the Londoners by Hengist at Crayford. The next record is A.D. 601 when "Ethelbert gave Mellitus a Bishop's See in London." See Gomme's "London," Chapter I.
- (4)—A Roman writer mentions a bridge in Londinium, and it is probable one existed about the site of old London bridge. It is also said that Roman coins were found under the foundations of Ethelbert's bridge.
- (5)—The Charter of William the Conqueror was the confirmation of rights possessed by the Londoners from time immemorial. See Gomme's "London," Chapter VI.

